The Finality of Faith Job 38:1-18 October 18, 1964

We live in what has been called the "Age of Anxiety". And it seems as if each new week brings ~~to~~ us ~~to~~ some new and ominous reason for anxiety. When one looks out on the world through the telescopic spectacles of newsprint, radio and television, one sees a bewildering array of unanswered questions, chaos and meaningless events. In the past few days we have been subjected to the added anxieties of a Soviet break-through in space technology, a drastic change in Russian leadership, the explosion of a nuclear device by the Chinese Communists and a tragic revelation having to do with the highest councils of our government. These new question marks, of course, are seen against the backdrop of continuting world problems:-Viet Nam, Berlin, Nuclear Testing, Civil Rights: problems we have learned to accept: and yet problems that bear in upon us with forbidding immediacy. When we allow ourselves a moment of integrity, and look at the meaning or non-meaning of these events and situations, we very well might join the Psalmist in his ~~despairing~~ despairing cry: "How Long, O Lord, how long."

Actually, our anxieities over recent happenings in the world have deeper roots than the past few weeks. In the past one hundred years our civilization has undergone a cataclysmic upheaval of most of ~~our~~ its basic traditions and cornerstones. Little by little, certainty has been stripped away, until there is very little you and I can be sure of. As science probes further and further into the wonder and intracacy of the natural world, our knowledge diminishes in importance and significance. One hundred years ago A man looked at the sky, and assimilated and understood what he saw. Today, scientific inquiry has pushed our knowledge aside. A look at the sky today tells us that the unknown is far greater than the known: and that man's fantastic scientific and technological achievments have merely opened the lid of a "Pandora's Box" full of mystery. ~~and the unknown~~.

Fifty years ago the average American couldn't have cared less about the slumbering Soviet Union or the Prussians and their designs. America

was a continental fortress, safe, self-sufficient and secure. 50 years later a kidnapping in Venezuela, a skirmish in the Himilaya's and a brick and concrete wall inflence our thinking and acting and our daily living.

Domestically the certainties of family, work and religion have succumbed to an internal revolution. We all face unemployment, delinquency, inflation depression, as viable possibilities in our own lives. And meanwhile the church, the bastion of American culture, grows in numbers and diminshes in effectiveness. Christianity in American life has so deteriorated ~~to the point that~~ that a candidate for the presidency can be proud of staying at home on Sunday morning: while his opponent goes to church to see if the sermon is as good as the one in his home church.

It is probably true that we have no more or less reason for personal anxiety than our fore-fathers. But we are no longer just individuals concerned with our little world. The twentieth century has forced us to be part of humanity as it struggles with gretaer problems. Our age has forced us to be deeply concerned with more than our families. We are, more so than ever before, part of the same humanity as the Cubans, Germans, Russians and Chinese: and their every move affects us deeply. And so I would suggest that the term: ("age of Anxiety") becomes more of a reality every day: - with no hope in site.

I see a definite kinship between us and our anxieties - and the Old Testament, tragic figure of Job. As you know, Job was a good man; a devout and pious man who served the Lord, was honored by his friends and loved by his family. But one day Job's life came crashing down upon him. His fortune, his life's labor, was gone in a moment; he was isolated from his family and afflicted with a physical illness. Job's real problem, however, was not this seiries of disasters. It was his anxiety. He was a strong man , he believed in God. Even in sickness and grief he held his head high. He had nothing to be ashamed of, and he could retain his self respect: he could still be Job, if he could keep hold of his Faith.

More than anything else, Job needed a support: something to hold on to: a resource where he might find the answer to his burning question of "Why".

Three friends came to Job: each in turn failed miserably to answer his questions or even to comfort him. And so finally Job turned to God. Through several discourses he asked God: "What are the charges against me, What have I done to deserve this? If only I could know why, I would be at peace. If only you would allay the uncertainty, the despair of my anxiety."

Like many a modern man, Job was bewildered and confused by the total disintigration of life's basic structures. Like many a modern man Job's anxiety grew out of the total absence of answers. There was no apparent meaning to what had happened. If only he could know the reason, the logic behind it all, he could adjust and live through the tragedy. And like many a modern man, Job brought his anxiety, his despair, his unanswered questions to God and demanded answers.

The 38th chapter begins with God's response to Job's questions:

> "Then the Lord answered Job out of the whirl wind. 'Who is this that darkens counsel ~~with~~ by words without knowledge? Gird up your loins like a man, I will question you, and you shall declare to me."

At the outset it appears that Job is not about to receive the answers he requested. Instead he found himself the object of a relentless interogation:

> "Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth? Tell me if you have understanding. Who determined its measurements? Surely you know."

Relentlessly, with a mocking cadence, the interogation continues:

> "Have you commanded the morning since your days began? And caused the dawn to know its place? Have you entered into the springs of the sea? Have the gates of death been revealed to you? Have you comprehended the expanse of the earth? Declare, if you know all this."

We feel sympathy for Job

~~What hope is there for Job?~~ Desparate, isolated, ruined financially and morally, he now finds himself cruelly rebuked by his God. And yet it is precisely this final rebuking by God that makes true faith possible for Job. He was searching for answers to some very difficult questions: questions, that in one forme or abother, present themselves in the life of every man: Why tragedy, why sickness, why death, WHY ME? Job was demandeing answers from God: but the only answer he received was a lengthy (" There is no answer".)

(In a sense the entire story of Job is the lesson we are so reluctant to learn :-that there are no answers for the mind to life's most urgent questions and that true faith in God is possible only when we see this truth and grasp it for ourselves. With his questions God drove Job to the wall, and taught him that there were no answers: and that as long as he depended on reasonable rational answers to his questions, he would continue to wallow in anxiety. God taught Job that true faith begins when we peer into the dark void and say I believe: ("I trust in God. ") And the discourses of Job end: ("Therefore I have uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me which I did not know. I had heard of thee by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees thee, therefore I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes.") In other words, Job found the faith he thought he had, not when he received the answers to his questions, but precisley at that moment when he realized there were no answers to be had. At that moment faith was born in Job. faih that depends on nothing but God himself: faith that goes beyond all the tragedies life may deal out: faith that heals despair and anxiety.)

The story of Job is a Biblical poem: a story handed down through the centuries, adorned with literary imbellishment. But what about today? What about mankind and his faith, or lack of it, tod ay?

The Protestant Reformed church rests heavily on Faith. We believe with St. Paul, that the righteaus are saved by faith: that is, not by the good ~~things we do~~

things we do, not by good works, but by our trust in God. And yet within me I feel that we don't know very much about either that kind of faith, or that kind of saving. I think we have, for too long, thought of religion as merely the vehicle to heaven. I think we regard religion--as our way of winning something that begins only after we die. And faith--our faith is very much dependent on what we can know and understand.

It is interesting to notice that the same Biblical word can be translated by the English words "save" and "heal." Jesus apparently used the same word when he said "you are healed" and you are saved." In other words, the state of being saved, (salvation,) begins now. Itis something that happens now--in our life time, and not just after we die. When we talk about God's saving grace we mean something that affects a change in us now--not only after we die. We mean that salvation is an added dimension to life in the immediate present; an added dimension thatmakes us whole men--at one with God, our neighbor and the world. This sving, healing, wholeness the N.T. describes is the opposite of anxiety. Job found this salvation when the truth finally broke in upon him that there were no answers, but there was God. It is this salvation; this wholeness and newness of life that we believe depends on faith. It is not something we can earn--or conjure up by a series of good works, or by obeying rules or laws. Rather it is a state of being that happens to a man when he has faith.

Why is it, then, that we seem to have such difficulty with faith? If things are that simple why isn't everybody at peace? Why don't we know more about our own salvation?

The answer lies hidden in our own hearts; an answer that was eloquently expressed by Job. Very simply--we want answers to our questions; we don't want to trust in anything that we cannot comprehend with our minds. Like Job, we want to be able to trust facts, logic, knowledge. Like Job,

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ultimately, we want to trust in ourselves. Man's fist and original sin was the desire to have all knowledge and therefore to be like God. Even in the garden of Eden, man was loathe to put this final, ultimate trust in God. And so we have trouble finding the faith that heals because we are reluctant to bow before the mystery of God--we find it impossible to accept the fact that because we are men we will never know the answers to life's burning questions. We turn our backs on the God who is Almighty the God who was and is and ever shall be--and put all our eggs in our own baskets. And instead of faith we find depair; instead of salvation we find anxiety; instead of peace we find ourselves in a hell that has "no Exit."

Unfortunately, much of what goes under the name of Christianity eagerly accommodates us in our desparate need for answers. The great appeal of the conservative, fundamentalist schools in both Protestantism and Catholociam is precisely the availability of simple, clear cut ansers. Both provide a framework in which to live; both structure living and thinking; both, in this regard, provide the security of ready answers; both live off the fear and promise of salvation after death. And both inhibit, almost entirely, the faith that is final--the trust that is ultimat and the wholenesss that can begin right now.

We all, at times, want our religion to do this for us. Like Job, we want a God who is a clelestial answer man--and a church that will relieve us of the responsibility of facing the unknown of life with courage and trust.

There can be no doubt that humanity needs salvation. There is something radically wrong with man as he is. And if we have the integrity to make the general confession, we will see in turn that there is something radically wrong in each one of us. We desperately need this healing-saving our Lord talked about, not a "pie in the sky when we die," but a newness, a wholeness in our lives right now.

It is tempting to cast our lot with knowledge; it is easy to believe that we will find the answers to all our questions; it is easy to accept a hundred different substitutes for the faith that demands aboslute courage andintegrity of us.

We will experience salvatin, however, when with Job, we look into the dark void of the unknown, affirming that there are no answers, giving up our trust in self and placing it in God.

~~The finality of faith is not in knowledge nor in self despair but in faith itself.~~

God has given us the gift of life; he has further given us the opportunity of becoming whole men, at peace with the world. His demand of us is only that we place our trust in him.

May God grant us the courage to face tomorrow's unknowns - without answers. May God give us Faith.

Amen